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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 004315

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: ADVANI'S RESIGNATION - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

REF: A. NEW DELHI 4270

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 4232

Classified By: Charge Bob Blake, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The turmoil surrounding Advani's dramatic June 7 resignation as BJP President continues. The BJP leadership meeting June 8 voted unanimously for him to remain, while the Sangh Parivar (family of Hindu nationalist groups) spent the day celebrating his resignation and anticipating his departure. In our view, Advani made this move deliberately, having decided that the party must change direction, renounce Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) and move to the political center. He took a major gamble to preserve his chances of becoming Prime Minister, but failed to rally the hard-line Sangh Parivar wing of the party around him, which is intent on returning the BJP to a Hindutva stance. There will be no quick resolution to the conflict between the Sangh and the modernizers. With the BJP immersed in inner turmoil, possibly for months to come, Congress and its allies have no serious obstacle to secure their hold on power. End Summary.

#### Fastbreaking Developments

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[1](#)2. (U) New Delhi has been engulfed in political drama since LK Advani submitted his resignation as BJP Party President on June 7.

--The Press has confirmed that Advani drafted his resignation letter while still in Karachi and was fully aware that his statements would likely lead to the loss of his position as BJP President.

--When he arrived at the airport in India, Advani was asked to sign a statement clarifying that his views as expressed in Pakistan were "dictated by protocol" and "did not indicate a change in policy." He refused to sign.

--It is not clear whether Advani will be able to hold onto his position as leader of the opposition in Parliament. Former FonMin Yashwant Sinha urged the BJP to consider whether he should be replaced in that position as well, which may embolden other Advani detractors to join in.

--With the exception of the Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena, the BJP allies in the NDA expressed support for Advani and urged him to withdraw his resignation.

--Former Prime Minister Vajpayee also supported his longtime confidant, saying that he agreed with Advani's controversial remarks regarding Pakistani founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Reftel B).

--The hard-line Hindutva VHP celebrated Advani's departure, praising the move as cleansing the party of deadwood and clearing the way for "younger" leadership.

--In Gujarat, BJP workers clashed with celebrating VHP supporters. Police broke up the fight and arrested 20 VHP workers.

--Although the RSS leaders and rank and file are pleased with Advani's departure, the leadership took a more moderate public stance, commenting that it was an "internal matter" of the party.

--The BJP leadership met in New Delhi on June 8 and passed a unanimous resolution rejecting Advani's resignation and delegating senior leaders to meet with him and persuade him to stay on.

--The resolution made no mention of Advani's Jinnah remarks, while Vajpayee told reporters the issue can be discussed later.

--There is some speculation that Advani could accept the BJP leadership's offer and withdraw his resignation, but most observers are convinced he will not.

--Attention has begun to focus on the succession. Most expect the BJP to name an interim president for approximately one month, with the moderates favoring former BJP President Venkaiah Naidu and the Sangh Parivar the doctrinaire RSS ideologue Ram Manohar Joshi.

--Staking his position as the favorite of the moderates, Naidu expressed "strong disapproval" of the "totally objectionable language" used by VHP leader Pravin Togadia to criticize Advani (he used the word "traitor").

#### Two Camps

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13. (C) The BJP/NDA has now split into two predictable camps, with the NDA's secular allies and BJP moderates supporting Advani and calling for him to remain as party President and the Sangh Parivar welcoming his departure and pressing for one of their own to be named to succeed him. Vajpayee has demonstrated that he still considers Advani his protege, convincing others within the party to also back him. The gulf between these two groups has grown so wide and so deep that it will be difficult for the party to maintain cohesion. All eyes will be on who is named as the next Party President. Whoever ascends to the position, the other camp will be embittered and alienated.

#### Ideological Consequences

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14. (C) Advani's public remarks in Pakistan hit hard at basic planks of Hindutva. He has rejected the RSS insistence on an Akhand Bharat (United India) that would include Pakistan, instead urging Indians to come to terms with the partition of India and respect Pakistan's borders and sovereignty. By describing the occasion of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992 as "the saddest day of my life," Advani rejected the Sangh Parivar's preaching of hatred against Islam and Muslims. By praising Jinnah as a "secular" leader and a "great man," Advani tried to bury the RSS villainization of Pakistan's founder and urged Indians to adopt a more objective view of the events surrounding partition. By taking these stances, Advani has burned his bridges with the Sangh Parivar and staked out new ground as a moderate and modern leader willing to move forward into uncharted territory.

15. (C) Advani clearly intended to move his party away from Hindutva, which he has apparently concluded is no longer a viable political option. Most Delhi-based political observers agree that this was a calculated "gamble," which could have far-reaching consequences for the BJP and the Sangh Parivar.

#### Why Did He Do It?

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16. (C) In conversation with Poloff on June 7, Congress Party Secretary Manish Tewari speculated that Advani had concluded

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that he needed to make a dramatic gesture to gain political momentum and preserve his chances of becoming Prime Minister.

Advani has already been Deputy Prime Minister and can only aspire to the top position. He may have concluded that he must make a dramatic move to the center or face political oblivion. Advani has been hounded for the past year by the Sangh Parivar and may have wanted to put the group in its place by resigning and then compelling the party to ask him back. Tewari theorized that Vajpayee and Advani could have mapped out the entire strategy prior to his trip to Pakistan.

Vajpayee submitted his resignation in 2004 under similar circumstances and all factions of the party united behind him and asked him to remain.

17. (C) It is clear that Advani's remarks in Pakistan were not spontaneous or "off the cuff." He was not overcome by emotion at returning to the land of his birth and youth. Advani is too much the politician for that. This lends credence to the musings of Tewari and others. It appears Advani hoped a dramatic gesture would enable him to lead the BJP to the center, reinforce the NDA coalition, replace Vajpayee as the grand statesman of the BJP, and contest upcoming elections from a position of strength with hopes of defeating the UPA.

18. (C) If this was indeed Advani's intention, developments have not gone according to plan. Advani seemed genuinely disappointed by the vitriolic criticism of Hindu hard-liners and the reluctance of the BJP to spring to his defense. The ecstatic celebration of his departure by the Sangh Parivar indicates that it feels that it has asserted its power and demonstrated that it will get its way. Advani will be unable to retract his resignation without appearing humbled and contrite. He may have calculated that he could sacrifice the Party President's job and use his position as leader of the opposition to counter his opponents in a more protracted battle. Should his enemies become emboldened to demand his resignation from that position as well, he would be facing a more serious fight. It is too early to count Advani out, but he could be facing the fight of his life in the months ahead.

## What Happens Next?

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9. (C) The BJP has been in decline since its electoral defeat in May 2004. Advani's resignation has increased the division and bitterness within a deeply divided party. The Sangh Parivar is determined to demonstrate that it can dictate to the BJP and will fight to ensure that it hand picks the next President. Were Joshi to be selected "interim" party President, it would indicate that the Sangh Parivar has prevailed. It would then move to ensure that the BJP chooses its candidate for the "permanent" Party President. Most commentators agree that the RSS is determined to get its way, and that even if Naidu or another moderate is named to the post, he/she will have to follow RSS dictates or face the ire of the hardliners. This could herald a return to Hindutva, which would isolate the BJP's NDA allies and BJP moderates. Such a move would result in the BJP's further decline and more losses at the polls and could break up the NDA as secular allies leave the alliance.

10. (C) This was reflected in the statements of BJP leaders, like Vinay Katiyar, who noted that "Advani's resignation will further disintegrate the party. It will deepen the crisis in the party." BJP National Executive Member Seshadri Chari opined that "the resignation will worsen the image of the already disintegrating party," complaining that "the timing could not have been worse." By joining forces with Advani, former PM Vajpayee rebuffed his mentors in the RSS, and displayed to the nation how deep the divisions run within the BJP.

11. (C) Should Advani and Vajpayee decide to take on the Sangh Parivar, they will face a hard battle without a quick victory and may well fail. The resulting conflict could consume the BJP for months to come, allowing Congress and its UPA allies to fill the resulting political vacuum and cement their hold on power.

## Excesses of the Press

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12. (C) The BJP has relied upon press manipulation and drama to score points with India's middle class. This tendency may yet come to haunt it. The Indian media have overplayed and overdramatized Advani's resignation, constricting his options. BJP politicians have played to the media, resulting in frenzied and hysterical statements. This has allowed Congress to play it cool and assume the role of the dignified and statesmanlike party. Advani's resignation has benefited Congress at the BJP's expense.

BLAKE